

*Testimony from Mark K. Leahy  
Chief of Police, Town of Northborough and  
President, Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association*

*February 17, 2011*

Madame Attorney General and distinguished members of the Commission,  
Good morning.

I am Mark K. Leahy, Chief of Police for the Town of Northborough. I also have the honor of serving as the President of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association, which represents Police Chiefs all across the Commonwealth. This morning I am pleased to testify before the Commission concerning the Police Chief's perspective on the issue of bullying.

As Chiefs, we are aware of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010 and the communications we have received from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have been helpful and informative. We are aware that our school districts are supposed to consult with local law enforcement as a component of developing their individual bullying prevention plans. We are also aware that our superintendents are supposed to communicate with the local chief of police before the first day of each school year about the implementation of bullying plans. We are further aware that this also applies to private, collaborative and charter schools in our jurisdictions.

As the association president, I polled Chiefs across the Commonwealth on this topic. They indicated that they believed the current laws were sufficient to address the problem.

I did ask some specific questions that I'd like to share with you. Please note that I had 97 respondents.

1. Has your town established an Anti-Bullying Policy?

85.6%= Yes      8.2%= No      6.2%= Unknown

2. Did your school department actively involve your police department in establishing the anti-bullying policy for your town?

72.2%= Yes      24.7%= No      3.1%= Unknown

3. Are you satisfied with your towns anti-bullying policy?

84.5%= Yes      15.5%= No

4. Question asked: Is the following statement correct? "School systems are reluctant to refer school issues to the police department."

Strongly agree= 19.6%      Agree= 37.1%      Disagree= 34%

Strongly disagree= 9.3%

5. How many bullying investigations has your department been involved in since September, 2010?

Low= Zero      High= 20      Average= 3.3

6. How many bullying prosecutions has your department initiated since September, 2010?

Low= Zero    High= 3    Average= 0.34

The Chief of one Central Massachusetts University separately conveyed the concerns of his campuses LGBT students, particularly over the issue of cyber-bullying, where anonymity is rather easily achieved by the offender.

Cyberbullying cases bring local police officers into the homes of many of our residents when their children become victims of often vicious bullying behaviors. The pain, anger, and embarrassment are clearly portrayed on the faces of the victims.

We all know the scars of bullying go far beyond those that may result from a physical assault. The emotional toll can last a lifetime and truly alter the path that a victim takes in his or her life. We- police, educators, legislators, parents and students- must stand and work together to diminish the affects of bullying in our communities. Police Chiefs and school administrators must maintain an open and productive dialogue to create an effective partnership to keep our schools safe. School resource officers are a highly successful tool in addressing all forms of school crime. The current economy and the reduction of grants aimed at increasing the number of school resource officers hamper these efforts. Every Chief knows that his or her school resource officer is an invaluable addition to crime prevention in their community. A good SRO gets to know the students and they, in turn, get to know him. This critical relationship is vital for our community. Often a SRO can pick out a bullied student and hopefully provide

support and intervention. Our goal is to address the issue of bullying, not jump to initiate criminal prosecution. Many bullying incidents are rightfully and properly handled by school officials. We should be a last, but available resort reserved for the most serious matters.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the Commission today. Please know that your Police Chiefs stand ready to assist our schools in every way possible.

Thank you!